

Police officer charged with manslaughter of Ian Tomlinson

More than two years after he pushed a man in the back at a London G20 protest, a police officer is to be charged with his manslaughter.

[Video](#) of police assault on Ian Tomlinson, who died at the London G20 protest.



A still from video footage obtained by the *Guardian* showing the aftermath of what appears to be a police assault of Ian Tomlinson on April 1, 2009. The video was shot by an investment fund manager from New York, who passed it to the *Guardian*. He has relinquished his copyright and wants it to be distributed freely.

In recent years, the Metropolitan Police have come in for considerable criticism over the heavy-handed or at times just plain inconsiderate way they have dealt with protesters. Central London is and always has been a magnet for political demonstrations; few of national significance ever take place in other parts of the country, so if nothing else the Met should be better prepared. While it is true that some people, especially black bloc, have ulterior or even sinister motives, the police have often been unwilling to draw a distinction between militants intent on violence or destruction of property on one hand, and *bona fide* demonstrators on the other. The practice of kettling has been arguably the most controversial of their tactics, leading to complaints that women with young children or even babies have been boxed in for hours without water or toilet facilities.

The G20 two years ago saw two particularly gratuitous assaults on protesters by police officers; one in which an albeit noisy though diminutive young woman, Nicola Fisher, was slapped in the face and then struck with a baton by a thug in uniform while she was walking away from him. He was charged with assault, but was acquitted in spite of compelling video evidence. The other, and paradoxically less serious assault, was a shove in the back.

It may be that PC Simon Harwood believed Ian Tomlinson was a demonstrator, rather than a newspaper vendor who was trying to get home through the crowds, but there was absolutely no reason for him to lay hands on him. Had he been able to foresee the consequences or simply realised that Mr Tomlinson was not a well man, he would almost certainly have let well alone. Alas, he didn't, and within minutes, Mr Tomlinson was dead.

Then followed the all too predictable cover up, but in an age when people routinely carry small video cameras around in their pockets, this is nowhere near as easy as it used to be. And it has to be said that for once the Independent Police Complaints Commission has lived up to its name. Even so, in July last year, the Director of Public Prosecutions announced that: “After a thorough and careful review of the evidence, the CPS has decided that there is no realistic prospect of a conviction against the police officer in question...”

Now, following the inquest, he has changed his mind, and today he announced that PC Simon Harwood is to be charged with manslaughter.

This case is now *sub judicæ*, so it would not be prudent to say more at this point, except that whatever its outcome, next time a police officer is tempted to assault a member of the public at a demonstration just for the hell of it, he will think twice.

[The above article was published originally May 24, 2011 with the linked video. The photograph also appears in [this article](#).]